Shir LaShalom – Song of Peace

Framing this unit

*Shir LaShalom* (Song of Peace) was written in 1969 by Yaakov Rotblit (words) and Yair Rosenblum (music). The song is very popular in Israel and serves as the unofficial anthem of the Israeli peace movement, particularly since becoming associated with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995.

*Shir LaShalom* was first performed by the Infantry Ensemble of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during the War of Attrition (1969–1970). The soloist was Miri Aloni, who later became a well-known singer and actress. Inspired by the anti-war songs of the 1960s, the song was written as if spoken by the fallen, calling on the country to fight for peace.

The lyrics question and confront values and traditions associated with the memorialization of the dead such as reciting the *Kaddish* prayer, singing the songs about war and fallen soldiers that were very common at the time, and placing flowers on graves. The song was controversial from the very beginning. It rejects the mourning and glorification of those killed in battle and emphasizes working for peace, and thus some people found it to be defeatist and demoralizing, while religious people objected to the suggestion that prayers serve no purpose. There were, however, many people who supported and appreciated the song's desire for peace.

At the end of a peace rally in 1995, Miri Aloni, along with Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, led the crowd in singing *Shir LaShalom*. Rabin was shot just moments later; the words to *Shir LaShalom* were found on a blood-stained piece of paper in his pocket after his death.

Group Activity

Listen to *Shir LaShalom* and read the lyrics in Hebrew or English. Summarize the main ideas of the song.

- What instruments or vocals can you hear in the recording?
- Write down five words that describe the recording.
- Which, in your opinion, is the most important line in the song?

Describe your initial impression on listening to the recording.

- What do you hear?
- What emotions does the recording inspire in you?
- What does it remind you of?

Choose a phrase from the song that you most relate to.

- Why did you choose this phrase? What does it mean to you?
Watch a video of Israeli soldiers singing Shir LaShalom. How does it make you feel to see soldiers singing a song about peace?

Discussion
- Who wrote the song?
- Who first performed the song?
- When was it written?

The song is speaking on behalf of a group of people.
- Who are they?
- What is their message?
- Why do you think the lyrics of song are not liked by some Israelis?
- Which lyrics do you think are controversial? Why?
- Who do you think would like the lyrics?
- Whose political views do they represent?
- What event is associated with the song?
- In what way is it associated with the event?
- Who was Yitzhak Rabin? In what way was he connected to the peace movement?
- This version of the song was performed by an IDF music troupe.
- What is the role of the IDF music troupes?
- Do you think these troupes are an important part of the army? Explain.

Creative Activity
- Draw a picture to accompany the song.
- Find another performance of this song and compare the two.
- Learn the song and teach it to your class or to another class in your school.

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il